

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BRUSSE 08038 161749Z

67

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-01

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AGR-05 COME-00 EB-04 LAB-01 STR-01 TRSE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2238

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: ELAB, BE

SUBJECT: TRADE UNIONS SIGN COMMON PLATFORM FOR
NATIONWIDE CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

SUMMARY: OCTOBER 16, THREE NATIONAL UNIONS (CSC, FGTEB
AND CGSLB) SIGNED COMMON PLATFORM FOR UPCOMING NEGOTIATIONS
WITH EMPLOYERS FEDERATION (FEB) FOR 1975-76 AGREEMENT.
THIS FOLLOWS ON HEELS OF FGTEB SPECIAL CONGRESS
WHICH CONSIDERED POSSIBILITY OF UNDERTAKING "NATIONAL
DAY OF ACTION" TO DRAMATIZE WORKERS' GRIEVANCES IN
FACE OF INFLATION AND INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT. FGTEB
SCHEDULED MEET AGAIN IN TWO-THREE WEEKS TO DECIDE
IF ACTION REQUIRED. FIRST FALL MEETING OF TRIPARTITE
ECONOMIC COMMISSION OCTOBER 15 ONLY PARTIALLY SATISFACTORY
TO UNIONS AND FGTEB PARTICULARLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT HANDLING
OF INFLATION. WITH UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM NOW LOOMING AS
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PAGE 02 BRUSSE 08038 161749Z

GREATER THREAT PARTICULARLY IN TEXTILES, BELGIAN WORKERS

FOLLOWING FRENCH EXAMPLE OF OCCUPYING FACTORIES TO PREVENT LAYOFFS OR CLOSING. WHILE UNIONS STILL AT ODDS ON POLITICAL ISSUES, REAL EFFORT BEING MADE TO PRESERVE COMMON FRONT ON SOCIAL QUESTIONS. NEW PLATFORM AGREEMENT GIVES UNIONS SOLID FRONT AGAINST FEB WHICH COULD MAKE FOR TOUGH NEGOTIATIONS BEFORE YEAR IS OUT. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF NEGOTIATIONS, CSC AND FGTEB REACHED AGREEMENT OCTOBER 16 ON COMMON PLATFORM FOR RENEWAL OF NATION-WIDE INTERPROFESSIONAL AGREEMENT WITH FEB. THIS TWO-YEAR AGREEMENT COVERS MINIMUM ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR ALL WORKERS IN PRIVATE SECTOR. SMALL LIBERAL UNION (CGSLB) ALSO SIGNED AGREEMENT SAME DAY. MAIN DEMANDS ARE FOR 15,500 (APPROXIMATELY US\$400) MINIMUM MONTHLY WAGE, EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN WHO "PERFORM WORK OF EQUAL VALUE", FULL COMPENSATION FOR TRANSPORT COSTS, FULL PENSIONS AFTER 45 YEARS FOR MEN AND 40 FOR WOMEN AND GRADUAL INTRODUCTION OF DOUBLE PAY FOR FOURTH WEEK OF VACATIONS.

2. FGTEB ASST, SEC GEN ALFRED DELOURME, WHO GAVE US ADVANCE COPY OF AGREEMENT (EMBARGOED FOR PRESS UNTIL OCT 17), SAID AGREEMENT WAS MAJOR STEP IN MAINTAINING COMMON FRONT ON SOCIAL PROBLEMS. HE FORESEES PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT AS GROWING CONCERN NOT ONLY IN TEXTILES BUT ALSO IN STEEL INDUSTRY WHERE ORDERS HAVE NOT INCREASED TO NORMAL FOLLOWING SUMMER SLOWDOWN. HE SAID FGTEB DOES NOT SUPPORT CSC IN OCCUPATION OF TEXTILE PLANTS WHICH FACED WITH CLOSING. LATEST EXAMPLE IS DAPHICA PLANT AT TOURNAI, DELOURME'S HOME REGION, WHICH CSC UNION OCCUPIED ON OCTOBER 15. HOWEVER FGTEB, WHICH IS MAJOR UNION AT DAPHICA, IS WORKING WITH CSC TO TRY FIND SOLUTION FOR PRESERVING WORKERS' JOBS IF POSSIBLE.

3. FGTEB SPECIAL CONGRESS OCTOBER 13 ADOPTED ECONOMIC DEMANDS OF SEPTEMBER PREPARATORY CONGRESS AND DISCUSSED POSSIBILITY OF DAY OF NATIONAL ACTION TO PRESSURE GOVERNMENT TAKE STRONGER MEASURES OF INFLATION OF EMPLOYMENT. FGTEB SEC GEN GEORGE DEBUNNE SAID FGTEB WOULD FIRST SEEK COMMON ACTION WITH CSC BEFORE DECIDING AT ANOTHER CONGRESS IN TWO OR THREE WEEKS ON ACTION TO BE TAKEN. SOME DELEGATES, PARTICULARLY INFLUENTIAL PRESIDENT OF WALLONIAN FEDERATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BRUSSE 08038 161749Z

ROBERT LAMBION, CALLED FOR FGTEB TO GO IT ALONE IF CSC DOES NOT AGREE ON ACTION DAY.

4. TRIPARTITE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC EXPANSION PRESIDED BY P.M. TINDEMANS OCTOBER 15 AGREED GIVING ECONMIN POWER TO EXTEND DELAY ON PRICE INCREASES FROM THREE TO SIX MONTHS AND MADE SOME REVISIONS IN TAX RATES TO PROVIDE RELIEF TO MIDDLE AND LOWER INCOMES. EXTENSION

OF DELAY IS COMPROMISE BETWEEN CSC CALL FOR ACROSS-THE-BOARD THREE MONTH FREEZE AND FGFB DEMAND FOR SELECTIVE FREEZES. DELOURME TOLD EMBOFF TGTB FAR FROM SATISFIED WITH COMMITTEES FIRST MEETING SINCE JUNE. HE SAID REAL PROBLEMS OF TAX REDUCTION ON GAS-OIL, FINANCING OF MEDI-CARE ANNUAL DEFICIT (4 TO 8 BILLION BELGIAN FRANCS) AND GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT EITHER IGNORED OR BARELY TOUCHED ON IN MEETING. HE DID CONCEDE PRICE PROBLEM WITH EXCEPTION PETROLEUM PRODUCTS LARGELY RESOLVED BY EXTENSION OF DELAY.

5. COMMENT: WITH TRADE UNION ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR APRIL 1975, STRAINS ON UNIONS COMMON FRONT HAD BEEN SHOWING BOTH ON POLITICAL AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS. POLITICAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN FGFB AND CSC LIKELY TO PERSIST AS LONG AS SOCIALISTS REMAIN IN OPPOSITION. HOWEVER, FACT THEY HAVE REACHED COMMON ACCORD ON NATIONWIDE BARGAINING INDICATES CLEAR DESIRE ON BOTH SIDES TO KEEP FRONT INTACT ON SOCIAL QUESTIONS. WHETHER THIS WILL RESULT IN COMMON "DAY OF ACTION" OR IN FGFB ABANDONING THIS PROPOSAL REMAINS TO BE SEEN. DELOURME, WHO NOT PART OF RADICAL WING OF FGFB, CONVEYED LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR PROPOSAL. IN ANY EVENT FACT UNIONS HAVE AGREED AT OUTSET ON COMMON PLATFORM COULD LEAD TO TOUGH BARGAINING WITH FEB ON OVERALL DURING REMAINDER OF 1974. THIS COULD ALSO CARRY OVER INTO SECTOR (INDUSTRY) BARGAINING SOME OF WHICH ALREADY IN PROGRESS. FIRESTONE

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